



EUNICE GIBSON HAS EXPERIENCED A WORLD OF BAD WINTERS

— Daily Mail Photo by Craig Cunningham

Slatyfork Snows

Postmaster Recalls Rugged Winters

STEEDMAN
Daily Mail Staff

SLATYFORK — When Eunice Gibson stands in the Pocahontas County settlement between Cheat and Elk mountains, she heard tales of the bad winters and waist-high

snow residents would point to 4,000 feet Cheat Mountain, now Cheat State Center, and say, "Snow down from the top of

the year, the 43-year old postmaster said the 100 area residents has been warned to be true — at least the late.

Gibson is one of the pleasantest of the area's winter rough of all

this winter compared to last winter," she said, standing inside her small oak-paneled post office in a corner of Dave Sharp's Store on W. Va. 219. Outside a small icicle slowly dripped in the afternoon sun.

More than 110 inches of snow had fallen by mid-January last year as compared with 56 inches so far this year, according to the National Weather Service.

Temperatures haven't differed much, however. On Jan. 3, it reached 15 degrees below zero, the same as last year's coldest temperature. Pocahontas County, historically, has the coldest and snowiest winters in West Virginia.

The lack of snow this winter doesn't surprise her, said Mrs. Gibson, who originally moved to Slatyfork from Elkins to live with relatives and then stayed

on after her marriage to a local man.

She expected a mild winter this year because November was warm.

"Historically, the winters start in November here. Sometimes we have snow in October. But the last couple of winters it's been starting in November," she explained, and added "I moved here because I like the serenity and quiet."

"I remember one Monday in 1943 in December, I think it was a week before Christmas. It started snowing at about 6:30 or 7:30 in the morning, just after I opened up the store.

"That night, I couldn't get away from the store. The whole area was covered up. We had a snow plow go through here once, but it didn't do much good.

"The mail didn't run that day and not

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again until Saturday. It was at least a week before the snows stopped and we could clean up."

The winter of 1956 was the coldest winter, Mrs. Gibson recalled.

"Along about 1956, it got down to 30 below zero a handful of times. That's right cold if you haven't experienced it before."

She said the snows seemed to blow forever and drifts piled high against the store's outside walls.

"I wasn't working here that winter as I recall," Mrs. Gibson said. "I was up on the farm. My husband and I had a sheep farm down the road near Mill Point."

The reaction of her sheep to the cold winds made that winter memorable, she said.

"Would you like to know how the sheep reacted?" she asked, half-joking and half-serious. "They cuddled up next to one another in the barn and didn't move. Of course they ate but then they always do."

"Whenever they saw a break in the storm they'd rush outside as if the world had come to an end. What they wanted was water. Well, we had a

brook that ran by the farm but the sheep wouldn't walk out to it.

"What happened was I had to shovel a path from the barn to the brook and then chop holes in the ice so they could drink."

In 1958, Mrs. Gibson said the temperature hovered around 11 degrees below zero day and night for one week.

"That's when it hurts the worst. The ground was frozen down two feet. How do I know that? Our pipes froze and they were two feet below the house."

Mrs. Gibson said she and her husband waited until the pipes thawed in the spring. They used water from a nearby spring for most of that winter.

People from Charleston and Huntington don't realize how greatly winter weather differs between the southern part of the state and the eastern mountains, she said.

"You could leave here in the midst of blowing, waist-deep snow and wouldn't see a bit of it down in the Charleston or Huntington area. You wouldn't believe the difference."

The winter of 1979 should end soon, Mrs. Gibson said. "Generally, we've had the worst by this time. We should have two hard weeks during February, but after that it shouldn't be too bad."